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ABSTRACT

Statistical data gathered by the National Center for Education Statistics were analyzed to identify correlations between race/ethnicity, age, and prose literacy among adults in 1992. According to the analysis, prose literacy was highest among those adults with the highest levels of educational attainment, and adults aged 19-54 had higher average literacy scores than did individuals aged 55 and older. Other key findings of the analysis were as follows: (1) Blacks and Hispanics with high school diplomas or General Educational Development (GED) certificates had literacy levels similar to those of Whites who had completed only 9-12 years of education and who lacked a high school diploma/GED certificate; (2) Hispanics achieved lower scores than Blacks or Whites on the prose, document, and quantitative literacy scales; (3) on the quantitative literacy scale, the difference between blacks and whites (63 points) was larger than that between white high school and college graduates (50 points); and (4) more than one-fifth of adults scored at the lowest level on the prose literacy scale, which means that they were unable to match/integrate multiple pieces of information when irrelevant (distracting) information was present or when background knowledge/inference drawing was required. (MN)

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ED 378 352

INDICATOR OF THE MONTH

NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

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January 1995

Adult literacy

The ability to read and use materials printed and written in English has implications for a person's job opportunities, sense of fulfillment, and participation in society, as well as for educational goals. Limited literacy levels in the population are increasingly being viewed as a national problem, with economic and social consequences that extend beyond the individual. Literacy levels are affected by both the quantity and the quality of an individual's formal education, as well as their participation in informal learning activities throughout their lives.

- **In 1992, adults with higher levels of educational attainment had higher average levels of prose literacy. Also, adults aged 19 to 54 had higher average levels of literacy scores than those 55 and older. The differences in literacy between younger and older adults may be due to the higher level of educational attainment among younger adults.**
- **Blacks and Hispanics with a high school diploma or a GED[1] had literacy levels similar to whites who only completed 9 to 12 years of education with no high school diploma.**
- **On all three literacy scales[2] (prose, document, and quantitative), the average literacy score for Hispanics was below that of blacks which was well below that of whites. On the quantitative literacy scale, the difference between blacks and whites (63 points) was larger than the difference between white high school and college graduates (50 points).**
- **More than one-fifth of adults scored at the lowest level on the prose literacy scale, meaning that they were unlikely to be able to match or integrate multiple pieces of information when irrelevant but distracting information was present, or when they had to use background knowledge or make inferences—common tasks faced in society.**

Average prose literacy of adults, by level of educational attainment and race/ethnicity: 1992

		Level of educational attainment							
Race/ethnicity	Total	0–8 years	9–12 years, no diploma	GED[1]	High school diploma	Some college, no degree	2-year college degree	4-year college degree	Graduate/ professional degree
Total	272	177	231	268	270	294	308	322	336
White	286	202	243	276	278	302	313	328	341
Black	237	159	213	243	242	267	276	288	298
Hispanic	215	135	200	240	242	265	291	282	312

Average prose literacy of adults, by age and race/ethnicity: 1992

		Age					
Race/ethnicity	Total	16–18	19–24	25–39	40–54	55–64	65 and over
Total	272	271	280	284	286	260	230
White	286	284	295	303	300	273	240
Black	237	248	254	251	235	212	187
Hispanic	215	237	238	215	211	192	170

[1]A GED diploma is earned by meeting state determined passage scores on the General Education Development (GED) exam.
[2]Scores are available in three domains of literacy: 1) prose, 2) document, and 3) quantitative.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Adult Literacy in America: A First Look at the Results of the National Adult Literacy Survey*, 1993.

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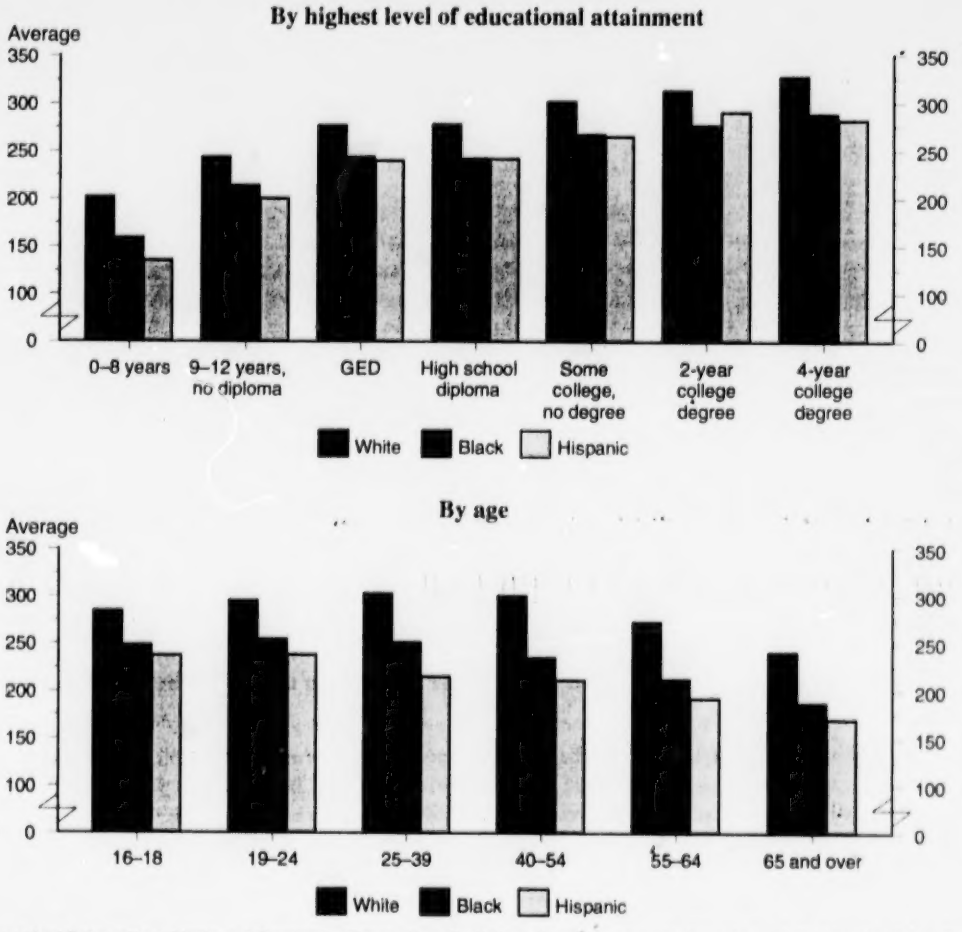
Average prose literacy of adults, by race/ethnicity: 1992



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Adult Literacy in America: A First Look at the Results of the National Adult Literacy Survey*, 1993.

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